Posture

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3 NEUTRAL SPINE FOR OPTIMAL CORE ACTIVATION

The final non-negotiable is the ability to maintain neutral. There isn't another exercise for this — instead, it's something to think about while you are walking, running and doing your current core exercises, so that you'll have effective transfer of your core strength into your activities.

Because everyone has a little different shape to their back, a neutral spine is different for everyone. Some people have more of a lumbar arch and some have less. It's OK if your lumbar neutral is different from a friend's. The often taught "Draw the belly button up and in" to flatten the back sends your spine position from one extreme to another, and it is not a functional way to engage the core or run. Instead of activating your spine stabilizers, this cue engages the muscles that move your spine. And that does not make for a stable spine. Neutral means the middle of the range of motion.

Finding a neutral spine: Stand with your feet a comfortable width apart. First think about where your weight is. More in the heels? More on the midfoot? To find the correct position, place one hand on your belly button, and one hand on your sternum. Imagine that the hand on your belly button is blocking your pelvis from shifting forward. Then drop the upper hand and sternum forward, bending slightly at the waist (not the ankle and knee) until you feel weight equally distributed over the forefoot and rearfoot. Aim to re-create this position anytime you walk or run. This your new normal posture. If you are someone who normally stands with a large arch, it may feel almost like you are leaning forward, because your perception of neutral has been too far back. The more you practice good posture when not running, the easier it will be to find and maintain it mile after mile. RT

Wharton's Simple Solutions no. 3

PIRIFORMIS SYNDROME

All injuries are a pain in the butt, but this one is quite literally. You feel pain or recurring discomfort in your gluteals (buttocks) and hip regions, which can be irregular and sharp or a constant dull aching. The pain can remain localized in the hip or can radiate down the leg or up into the lower back.

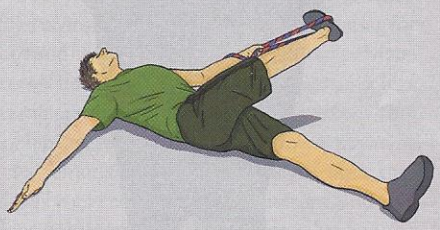
WHAT IT IS

Piriformis syndrome is typically caused by compression or entrapment of the sciatic nerve by the piriformis muscle as the nerve passes through the buttocks. It is sometimes called "sciatica."

RESET IT

The best reset strategy is to target the piriformis muscle with an active-isolated flexibility exercise. This will relax the muscle, promote oxygen and blood circulation in the region, and relieve pressure and friction between the nerve and muscle.

step 1



step 2

1. Lie on your back with both legs extended. Hold the ends of a rope together so that they form a loop. Place the foot of the leg you are exercising into the loop. Lock your knee so that your leg is straight. Turn your toes inward for further stabilization.

2. Using your quadriceps and hip flexors, lift your leg straight up until it is perpendicular to the surface (at a 90-degree angle) while "climbing" up the rope with both hands, hand over hand.

3. When your leg is in position, grasp the ends of the rope (to maintain the loop) with the hand opposite the exercising leg. Extend your other hand (the one on the same side as the exercising leg) straight out to stabilize your body and keep you from rolling. Keep slight tension on the rope.

4. Contract your adductors, internal hip rotators and lower abdominals to bring your leg across your body and straight down to the surface until your hip begins to roll up. Do not pull the leg into position or you will irritate your hip.

5. Bring your leg back up to the perpendicular position (Step #2) and then back down to the floor (Step #1).

6. Repeat eight to 10 times.

runningtimes.com/oct12
Watch a video of Phil Wharton performing the piriformis syndrome reset technique. Plus, get more information at **whartonhealth.com**

IMPORTANT NOTES:

- As with all active-isolated flexibility work, hold the end range of motion for only one and a half or two seconds.
- Keep the knee of the exercising leg as straight as possible.
- Raise the leg less than 90 degrees if necessary.

Illustration: Dan Hanafin